

GOD IS IN THE DETAILS**Exodus 18**

Intro: Kathy and I arrived home this past Monday from a 10-day trip out west. One doesn't undertake such a trip by just deciding on Thursday and then leaving Friday morning. Oh, you can do it, but it's much easier if you work ahead, because there's much planning to do.

For our trip, we bought our plane tickets and rented our car all the way back on January 1st and 3rd respectively. The arrangements for the time that we stayed with Joe and Shae at their ranch were made very early on as well. Our lodgings at Glacier Park were reserved in November of last year! With all those details cared for we didn't have to worry what would happen in that end. But three weeks ago when we only had four days left to prepare, I really had not begun to think about what we should pack for a 10-day trip. This was especially crucial since we were limited by the fact that we were flying and would not have the extra space a car would afford. The closer I got, the more nervous I felt. Finally, with our departure time looming very early on Friday morning, I finally set to packing on Wednesday night. I was very careful and deliberate, and it turns out I did a good job. I certainly didn't take too little, and I probably didn't take too much – I planned well.

When I go to deer camp November in Pennsylvania where I will be spending 4 or 5 days in a wilderness cabin, I need to make sure that I have the right number of clothes and boots and the right kind. I have to make sure that I have my gun and ammunition, and the proper permits, and a knife, just in case the miraculous would happen and I would actually harvest a deer. One cannot just do that the day before. One must sit down and carefully make a list.

Ministry is the same way only infinitely more important. The Church is not a fly-by-night organization. Details are important—and as we seek God we soon realize that God is in the details, and we will accomplish much as we seek his face.

Now, you've probably heard the expression "The devil is in the details." and though I was pretty certain what the idiom means, I wanted to make sure that I got it right. So, of course, I used that impeccable research tool, Google, to look it up and confirm what I suspected. This is what Wikipedia had, *"The devil is in the details" is an idiom alluding to a catch or mysterious element hidden in the details; it indicates that "something may seem simple, but in fact the details are complicated and likely to cause problems". It comes from the earlier phrase "God is in the details", expressing the idea that whatever one does should be done thoroughly; that is, details are important.* Right away I realized that my creative idea, which I thought was original, God is in the details, was not at all original with me. Here, it's been an idea for centuries. But the truth is, it's far older than a couple hundred years because it was certainly evident here in our text in Exodus 18.

Listen as I read, **(Read Exodus 18)**

Now, let's take some time and look at Moses's administrative learnings and abilities. His details are important because they're important for us to apply in our own lives and ministry.

First, for Moses . . .

FAMILY IS FIRST

- It's obvious here that Moses's wife and children were not with him in Egypt. We don't know if he evacuated them from Egypt when he began agitating for the freedom of the people of Israel, or he never took them with him in the first place – they were not with him as The

Way Out, which is what Exodus mean, began. I think Moses was a lot like me. He probably hated not being with his family. But he took care of his family first and left them in the safe care of his father-in-law. Their safety as he led the Israelites was a top priority.

- Now Moses is nearby to his adopted homeland and his father-in-law brings his little family to him and he is wild with joy. And right in front of his family he proceeded to show his strongest leadership ability, and it was how he treated his elders, he bowed down to his father-in-law, and he kissed him.
- As a father-in-law, Jethro was a wonderful teacher as well. He knew a good thing when he saw it. He had heard all the amazing reports about the journey out of Egypt and he knew that Israel was God's people. He also knew they were led by his son-in-law who had learned well from his father-in-law. One of the things that he probably had taught Moses, was family first. As you take care of your family first and foremost, everything else will fall into place.
- The next thing that we see about Moses's attention to detail was that. . .

MOSES WAS TEACHABLE

- Here was the man who was a reluctant leader. If you can remember back far enough, you know that when Moses ran into trouble, he was apt to run away from it. He had fancied himself a savior when he found an Egyptian abusing an Israelite, and killed that Egyptian in defense of his fellow Hebrew. (Exodus 2). His action was misinterpreted by his countrymen, and they accused him of murder. So Moses ran... He ran a long way into the wilderness. Where, as God ordained it, he found his wife, Zipporah, and gained a Godly father-in-law.
- Then, I'm sure you remember, how when God called him as he spoke to the burning bush, Moses was so reluctant to accept God's calling to be the one who led his people out of Egypt, that he came up with solution after solution that did not include him. God insisted because he knew that Moses had what it took.
- So now, here we are, and Moses has been transformed from a lonely shepherd who didn't think that he was a leader, and certainly not an eloquent one, to being the arbiter of every problem in the company of the people of Israel. Israel. He was the only counselor. He was the only advisor. He was the only theologian (well, actually he his brother Aaron's help on that one). But, the reality was, Moses was doing everything!
- Jethro told him *"What you are doing is not good."* Exodus 18:17. And it wasn't! Moses was providing care for the people of the Israel from sunup to sundown, day in and day out and he was working himself into an early grave. Dad saw a problem, and he told him so.
- And Moses listened! He took his father-in-law's advice and set up a very helpful system (suggested by Jethro) to deal with the daily issues of the people of God.
- Moses was teachable. He didn't look at his father and say *"What do you know old man?"* Instead he applied what he learned.
- This is one of those important details of leadership: No matter who it is who gives you advice, whether they're younger or older or smarter or not, you listen very closely because what they offer is often extremely helpful.
- Moses learned an incredibly helpful thing. . .

DON'T BE AFRAID TO DELEGATE

- In my 45 years of ministry, I was an associate pastor in two churches for about 6 of those years. For the most part the churches I have pastored, have not been large enough to need in an associate, and very often have not been able to afford one, even if they did need one. But, in the one case when I hired an associate, I applied what I learned very early from an experienced pastor who taught that if you're going to hire someone, find someone who is better than you at the task you are hiring them for. Some leaders are guilty of being threatened by excellence and they are not good leaders because of that. Good leaders elevate good leaders.
- When I was Roy Peterman's Associate Pastor at Manheim Brethren in Christ Church, he noticed that the congregation responded well to my preaching. Instead of being threatened by that, he doubled my preaching load. He changed it from once a month, to every other week. He pushed me forward, because he saw the capabilities in me that he wanted to develop. I will be forever grateful for Roy's humble leadership in my life, and I have tried to pass that on over the last 30 years.
- F.B. Meyer wrote, *"It is far better to set a thousand people to work than attempt to do the work of a thousand. The greatest and most useful men are those who know how to delegate to others work for which these are quite competent,"* Moses could have held on to his administrative duties. After all there is great occupational security in being needed as much as he was needed. Instead, he saw the wisdom of Jethro's suggestion, and delegated the leadership duties that he had been handling alone.
- God was in the details. Jethro pointed this out when he said, *If you do this, God will direct you, you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace.* Exodus 18:23 Wise leadership helps us to endure.

Conclusion: Moses listened. They are key words. The Christ follower, who in some way or another leads, and really, that's all of us, will do well to know that God is in the details. They know that family first is the best policy. They know that teachability is the best way to learn. They are not threatened by delegation, and they listen. Their ears are tuned to God's voice, and also to the wisdom of their brothers and sisters. God is in the details. Amen